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THE DERIVATION OF THE NAME *DATISCA* (DATISCACEAE)

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ABSTRACT

The name *Datisca* is attributed to Dioscorides in *de Materia Medica*, where it was cited as a Roman common name for species of *Catananche* (Asteraceae). Linnaeus apparently appropriated the name from Dioscorides but used it for species of a different genus and family. The derivation of the original name remains unknown.
KEY WORDS: *Datisca*, Datiscaceae, Dioscorides, *de Materia Medica*.

The Datiscaceae, as it will be treated in the Flora of North America, consists of a single genus of perennial herbs, *Datisca*, composed of two species. These are *D. cannabina* L. of southwest Asia from the eastern Mediterranean to the Himalayas and *D. glomerata* (C. Presl) Baillon of California, extreme western Nevada (near Lake Tahoe) of the southwest United States, and Baja California Norte, Mexico.

Interest in the derivation of the name *Datisca* originated with the preparation of a treatment of *Datisca glomerata* for the Flora of North America North of Mexico project. The etymology of generic names is a required entry in the generic descriptions. The present manuscript is intended to supplement the brief statement on the derivation that will be presented there.

Few references were found on this topic, possibly a reflection of the small size and lack of economic importance of the family. Stone (1993), in a treatment of *Datisca glomerata* for *The Jepson Manual*, merely stated "derivation unknown." In a treatment of *Datisca cannabina* L. in *Flora of the U.S.S.R.*, Gorshkove (1949), gave the following etymology: "from Greek *datessai* – to heal and *iskeiv* – to equate. The aerial parts of the plant are used internally in Italy for treatment of gastric, scrofulous, and other complaints." Lacking other comments, this explanation seemingly implied that the name *Datisca* was created by Linnaeus, which it was not. He also failed to mention that the name, as used in the original source, referred to two (or more) species. Despite the passing of 257 years since Linnaeus's use of the name, the etymology of *Datisca* has remained unresolved.

The name *datisca* was discovered by Blizzard in an English translation of *de Materia Medica* (Osbaldeston & Wood 2000), originally written in 64 CE by the Greek physician and botanist Pedanius Dioscorides (40–90 CE). The name is included in the treatment of the plant *Katananke* (or *Catanance*) in Book 4-134, where it is cited as a Roman common name.

The suggested identity of *Katananke* is not the genus *Datisca* but either *Catananche graeca* L. or *C. caerulea* L. (Asteraceae). Neither species of *Catananche* resembles *Datisca cannabina*, a name suggesting similarity to *Cannabis sativa* L. The name *datisca* was later applied by Linnaeus (1753) to the genus now known as *Datisca*. The statement by Dioscorides that *datisca* is a common name used by the Romans only gives the source of the name used by Linnaeus, not the origin of the word itself. In short, the *datisca* of Dioscorides and the *Datisca* of Linnaeus and Gorshkove (1949) are different plants. The word *datisca* itself, as used by Dioscorides, is best considered to be of unknown origin.

Linnaeus (1753) apparently borrowed names liberally from *de Materia Medica* for inclusion as generic names in *Species Plantarum*. For example, the name of nearly every plant Dioscorides treated in Book 4 was used by Linnaeus as a generic name in *Species Plantarum*. Many of the local common names were also used by Linnaeus as generic names, a good example being *datisca*. Others include *salix* (under 4-46, *ippouris*), *vaccinium* (under 4-63, *uakinthos*), *ricinis* (under 4-164, *kroton e kini*), etc. Dioscorides often gave the source of these names (such as the Magi [magicians, "wise" men], Romans, Africans, Egyptians, Persians, Gauls, etc.). Probably due to general unavailability of *de Materia Medica*, the name *datisca* has remained undiscovered for over 1900 years in one of the most successful medical books of all time.

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